

CHAPTER 4

A History of Allah.com

Prof. Albrecht Hofheinz of history, Solo

Figure 1:

(correction: It was registered in 1986 in Santa Fe, NM, USA then transferred in 1995 to another offshore registry, Figure 1: showed 1986 date)

Allah.com in May 2005

Perhaps the most prestigious web address that Muslims might imagine is Allah.com. Who stands behind it, and what can we learn from looking at its history? This chapter provides a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the development of the site. As a historian of Islam, my primary interest here has been to find out what attitudes and changes in attitudes among contemporary Muslims the site may reflect and help us to understand. The analysis, I hope, will demonstrate

that proponents of 'traditional' content on the internet not only use the

106 WEB HISTORY

new medium to extend existing practices and ideas but thereby also contribute to structural changes that may be interpreted as 'modern.'

I cannot begin here to engage the vast literature on Islam and modernity. Space only permits me to outline my own use of the term. A key mark of 'modernity'

is a conscious distancing from an inherited/past order of things (often conceptualized

as 'tradition') in favor of an order devised according to transparent standards that are deemed valid not because they already exist and are therefore socially self-evident, but because they conform to norms of rationality and are open to public review and criticism in which every rational individual can partake. 'Rationality' here need not necessarily mean 'secular' rationality. In this definition, it is not only the contrast to tradition, but the subjugation of 'traditional' order to conscious criticism according to newly evaluated standards that is central. Equally so it is the agency of individuals as participants in a public sphere ideally open to all, the idea that 'everyone' has the right to a voice, and therefore the obligation to understand, in order to participate in judgment and control. Therefore, processes of individualization are an integral structural part of modernization, even if the individuals concerned do not necessarily embrace 'modernist' views. It is this latter aspect that the present case can serve as an example of.

My sources are largely drawn from the Internet Archive Wayback Machine (<http://www.archive.org>) as well as 'live' interaction and private archiving, chiefly in 2003, 2005 and 2008, supplemented by common web tools such as whois or Alexa. I did not resort to interviewing, in an attempt to demonstrate the extent (and thereby also the limits) of what can be found out using only online sources. Methodologically, I contend that web texts (understood broadly as what in internet speak is often called 'content') are not fundamentally different from other texts. The internet may pose particular challenges such as defining a text that is part of a hyperlinked reality and that includes multimedia elements, or of establishing

and retrieving 'versions,' given not only the rapid and frequent changes that many sites undergo but, even more so, the intrinsically dynamic character of

interactive sites. But texts have at all times been fluid and embedded in intertextual relations and extratextual contexts. Further, texts have always been mere traces surrounded by what has been lost or suppressed; not only the Internet Archive

but any archive has always had many more holes than content. For all these reasons, the interpretation of texts must necessarily be an open-ended, dialectical

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

107

hermeneutic exercise. A hermeneutic approach can therefore go a long way to helping us understand web texts, just like any other text.

THE SURFACE:

SUFIS QUICK TO EMBRACE A NEW MEDIUM?

The address Allah.com was registered relatively early (in 1995) (**correction: It was registered in 1986 in Santa Fe, NM, USA then transferred in 1995 to another offshore registry, Figure 1: showed 1986 date**) and for many

years (1998–2006) appeared to be linked to the Sammaniyya tariqa, a Sudanese religious brotherhood. More specifically, it referred to the spiritual authority of Shaykh !asan al-Fati" Qariballah (d. 2005), a famous Sammani shaykh from Omdurman. Originally, it called itself "the site (electronic mosque) of Allah on the Internet"; later, this was toned down to the "First Site of Prophet Muhammad on the Internet."¹ Its mission was to promote "The Leading Islamic Revival

Plan," as follows:

1. FREE www.JesusMuhammad.com all Global Preaching and Beautiful Dialog and Guidance where Bishops, Priests and Rabbis are embracing Islam
2. FREE Download area contains over 70 Free books and children collection and growing children
3. FREE Muhadith Training Across the Globe—www.Ghumari.org (Please sign-on). No longer the youth will abandon the Prophet Saying
4. FREE Intensive Islamic Training—(Please sign-on for the opportunity near you) with FREE Multimedia Presentations (NEW)
5. FREE Islamic University for traditional Islamic Scholars
6. FREE Ihsan Spiritual Training—www.Qadiria.com (Please sign-on) Over 1000 Centers in Africa and growing worldwide
7. FREE Muslim Marriage with local Imams/Mosque Interface²

In other words: it promised to be a hub for dialogue-oriented Muslims with an education programme ranging from children's books to general Islamic training to university-level studies to spiritual guidance in the Sufi tradition, and how to complement one's faith with a good Muslim marriage.

In earlier incarnations, the site advertised an "Interactive Islamic College (tm)" with a relatively short (i.e., excellent) authority link (sanad) of only "35 teachers between you and the Prophet" and which contained for download "all the documents that every Muslim needs."³ It was also characterised by outspoken antipathy towards the Wahhabis.

108 WEB HISTORY

So was this a modern incarnation of an ancient Sufi brotherhood from the Sudan? Was the Sammaniyya under Shaykh !asan Qariballah (who was well known for his anti-Wahhabi stance, and who was regarded as a 'modern' shaykh in the Sudan due to his adoption of 'modern' bureaucratic and technical means of organisation and communication) particularly quick to embrace the new medium of the internet to spread their message to the world?

A look behind the scenes reveals a somewhat different yet no less interesting

picture.

A SOFTWARE GURU

The domain Allah.com was registered, together with Muhammad.com, on June 28, 1995, by Ahmad Darwish (ldapguru@yahoo.com) of Linuxvision, Sharjah (United Arab Emirates). Less than two months later, on August 17, 1995, Ahmad Darwish registered mosque.com, completing a trinity of sites that for many years mirrored each other. His “Mosque of the Internet” was first hosted by New Mexico Internet Access, Inc., in Albuquerque, under the address <http://www.nmia.com/~mosque>. Ahmad Darwish’s email address reflected the fact that he was a specialist in LDAP, or “Lightweight Directory Access Protocol,” an internet protocol that email programs can use to look up contact information from a server. Together with one Ahmad Abdel-Hamid, Ahmad Darwish (who seems to have been an employee or consultant of Sun Microsystems at some point and who in most of his computer-related business refers to himself as “Alan Darwish” (Alan Darwish < Main < TWiki, 2004) (Ahmad Darwish’s profile, 2005) founded the company Linuxvision sometime in the 1990s. Linuxvision was apparently first registered in the Cayman Islands for tax reasons and later moved to St. Louis (but with a phone number in Dallas, TX), and had representatives in Chicago, Dallas, Cairo (Ahmad Abdel-Hamid), Karachi, Bombay, and Dubai. Linuxvision struggled to find a market niche as the internet boom took off, betting on offering Arabic support under the Linux platform. In 1999, it developed the “Sheba Linux Arabization Server Package” which added some Arabic support to Linux’s GNOME user environment. Sheba was doomed, however, due to a lack of development in a constantly changing open-source world. A number of other projects—e.g., to establish a *Halal* offshore bank or “the largest Muslim public offering

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

109

company”—also never got off the ground.⁴ In late 2001, the people behind Linuxvision established a new company, iShebaPlanet, which focused on tailor-made software solutions, especially medical software for Palm Pilot handhelds.⁵ iShebaPlanet was headquartered in Dubai with a branch in Egypt. The new enterprise was not especially successful either. In 2002, it was taken over by CompuEx, an Arab-Pakistani-American computer retailer, later eReseller, and then Internet Service Provider in Houston (est. 1984), who continued to sport the logo for a few years before dropping it again in favour of “Linuxvision,” which continued to be run by Ahmad “Alan” Darwish out of his home in Oak Park, IL, where he offered support for the company’s three Linux-based Java applications until 2006.⁶ During 2007, Linuxvision.com mirrored Allah.com, then in 2008, after Ahmad’s return to the Middle East (see below), it was transformed into the “Royal Global Hajj Gateway,” Mecca, the “First Global Enerprise [sic] EGov Solution with the new advanced Royal visionary gov2gov, B2B, end2end architecture.” Again, however, this project faltered before being realized. The domain ‘hajjgateway.com,’ registered by Ahmad Darwish on February 18, 2008, was not taken into active use; instead, linuxvision.com was redesigned as HajjGateway. By March 2009, there was no active content behind the Flash façade (which was maintained at <http://salicehajic.startlogic>.

com/darwish/hajjgateway/, the site of Samir Alicehajic, a Muslim software engineer from Croatia, that also mirrored Allah.com). Curiously, Ahmad Darwish submitted spurious contact information to the Whois record for hajjgateway.com, including a telephone number belonging to the National Transportation Safety Board in Washington, DC. By May 2009, both linuxvision.com and salicehajic.startlogic.com had disappeared from the net.

What drove this software broker to open the “first mosque on the internet”? A “mad [b.] [Kamil] (al-)Darwish (as he refers to himself in Arabic) was born in Cairo in 1952. He studied for a while at al-Azhar University, but like many other Egyptians left his home country in 1976 to seek his fortune in the oil-rich Gulf, where he found work as a computer specialist. It is from Sharjah that we have his first picture, showing him as a devotee of al-Sharif al-Muhaddith Abdallah al-Ghumari—more on him below.

110 WEB HISTORY

Figure 2: Ahmad Darwish with al-Ghumari,
Sharjah 1977

In 1981, Ahmad Darwish moved to the United States “after receiving an invitation from the Muhammad Ali Foundation”;⁷ he settled in the Chicago area (where Muhammad Ali lived). Later, with an English woman from Bristol whom he presents as a “poet … from an established English family” (Darwish, 1998) who converted

to Islam (Anne Khadija Stephens); they progressed the site in two languages Arabic and English. In the 1990s, the family lived in Freemont, California, for a while before moving back to Chicago. In 2006, after a quarter century in the United States, Ahmad abandoned his Linux software business. He returned to live in Cairo (and Jakarta) and began to present himself more outspokenly as a religious authority in his own right, as “Shaykh Ahmad Darwish.”⁸ His path from systems engineer to turbaned Shaykh can be retraced

through an archaeology of Allah.com.

Figure 3: Shaykh
Ahmad Darwish,
2008

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

111

REVIVAL THROUGH TRADITION

The first noted religious influence on Ahmad Darwish came from “Abdallah b. Mu’ammad b. Siddiq al-Ghumari (1910 or 1914–1993), a Moroccan of Prophetic (Idrisi) descent from a well-established family of religious leaders in Tangiers.”⁹ His father was a leading Moroccan scholar of h. adith (Prophetic Tradition) at the turn of the twentieth century who headed a (Shadhili) lodge there named al-Zawiya al-Siddiqiyya. After early studies in Tangiers and Fes, Abdallah left for Cairo in 1930 to become a professor (alim) at the Azhar, Sunni Islam’s most renowned university, where he specialized in the sciences of h. adith. He worked for religious revival and had links to the Muslim Brotherhood and several related organisations. Because of these links, he was imprisoned from 1959 to 1969 like many other Muslim Brothers. He resumed his teaching and writing after his release, and at the end of his life returned to Tangiers, where he

died.

"Abdallah al-Ghumari was as staunch a supporter of Islamic revival based in the Prophetic Tradition as he remained committed to his Maliki and #ufi heritage. In other words, unlike more radical reformers, he did not use Prophetic Tradition to question the juridical and ethical/mystical heritage that centuries of scholastic learning had produced. He therefore opposed the fundamentalist Wahhabi and Salafi version of Sunni thought as epitomized by the influential Shaykh Na#ir al-Din al-Albani (1914-1999), and was ready to cooperate with the Zaydi imam of Yemen on a revision of the Zaydi ShiZite Encyclopaedia. He thus represented a 'traditionalist' version of Islamic thinking, one that was more accommodating of Islam's legal and mystical heritage than the Wahhabi/Salafi trend.

It remains unclear how Ahmad Darwish first came to know !Abdallah al-Ghumari (whether in Cairo or in Sharjah) and what the precise nature of their relationship was, but when al-Ghumari visited the United States in 1981—apparently at the invitation of Warith Deen Muhammad (1933-2008), who steered the black separatist Nation of Islam towards a more 'orthodox' understanding

of the faith—Ahmad Darwish was actively involved by helping, i.e., to put together a collection of "8381" "adiths that were given to Warith Muhammad in a clear effort to support his "Sunni" reform.¹⁰ Whether or not it was al-Ghumari who inspired Ahmad Darwish to turn to Prophetic Tradition as a key

112 WEB HISTORY

source of Islamic revival, Ahmad came to share his basic outlook: one that defends the centuries-old heritage of Islamic scholarship against 'fundamentalists' attacking the scholastic law schools as well as mystical interpretations of Islam.

ISLAMICWARE: COMPUTERIZING THE HERITAGE

(1986)

In 1986, Ahmad Darwish first seems to have put together his computer skills and his impulse to spread Islam by making English translations of the Koran available in electronic form. This included not only the well-known translations by Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall but also a translation by himself and his wife, dubbed a "contemporary" version. To market this product, he established "IslamicWare," which by December 1992 advertised version 7 of "The Holy Koran & Explanation" on a number of CDs ranging from 80-280 USD.

The "first electronic Islamic encyclopedia" was also announced to be due shortly (Hashem, 1992).

ONTO THE HIGHWAY: THE MOSQUE OF THE INTERNET

(1995)

Meanwhile, however, the world of electronic information changed. In 1993 the Mosaic browser was released, an easy-to-use interface to the newly conceptualized World Wide Web. By late 1994, the public at large became increasingly aware of the internet. Ahmad Darwish was quick to react. In 1995, he registered his first three domains to create what he advertised as "the first Islamic site on the web ever" (<http://web.archive.org/web/20000229112458/http://www.Allah.com/>). This is clearly an exaggeration—Islamicity, for example, started earlier, in February 1995—but nevertheless, Ahmad Darwish was among the pioneers of Muslim domains on the internet.

The principal raison d'être of Ahmad's "Mosque of the Internet" was the distribution

of his Koran translation, which he advertised as "the most authentic translation in modern English."¹¹ Ahmad also offered "for the first time in the West, the explanation of Al Fatihah (...) available to non-Arabic speaking readers," as well as a Life of the Prophet Muhammad that he and his wife had written and for which in December 1996 they received high praise from "Prof. Hasan al Fatih Qaribullah, former Dean, Umm Durman Islamic University": "This

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

113

work—in my opinion, and I am sure that other Muslim scholars will agree—is far more authentic than the work of Martin Lings and definitely more authentic than Haykal's work, moreover it will touch the hearts of all ages..."¹²

Building on these translations and texts, Ahmad developed the idea of making other texts on Islam available for download, first in the form of "the largest DB 18mb on Islam," and then as a "trademarked" "Interactive Islamic College" (IIC) that promised instruction in the Koran, Hadith, jurisprudence, Arabic, Seerah [the life of the Prophet], Islamic economy, as well as sections on "interfaith" and a "children Islamic corner." The college was to be the Islamic part of the 'information superhighway' that was the catchword of the day: "The Prophet said: 'Any one that takes a highway for knowledge, Allah will make an easy highway to Paradise for that person.'" "Enrol Now," Ahmad urged Muslim surfers, there are "Limited Openings." The courses offered "are only available in this Interactive

Islamic College and are the highest in quality and written by traditional professors of Islam with 310 years of combined expertise, each having written over 100 books, headed by Prof. Hasan Muhammad El-Fatih Qaribullah." The 310 man-years of combined experience—an idea borrowed from the software industry—later grew to 4,000 years.

Ahmad went as far as to call his site "The Azhar Mosque of the Internet," and proudly presented his credentials from leading North American media sites: PC Computing Nov 1996 selected this site together with 6 Islamic sites to be amongst top 1001 sites in the whole WWW. Two out of these 6 sites have unfortunately shut and the remaining sites have 10 times less visitors than the Mosque.

The Azhar Mosque of the Internet has been elected by the Discovery Channel; AOL linked to the Mosque on 9/27/1996; CNN has linked to the Mosque under: http://www.cnn.com/EVENTS/world_of_faith/links.html and <http://www.zdnet.com/pccomp/cdron/951228/webmap/religion.html> PC top 1001¹³

The texts actually offered on the IIC amounted to an eclectic collection: the translation by Ahmad and his wife of the Koran and of a selection of Prophetic Traditions (the beginnings of a project to translate 8,266 "adiths common to both al-Bukhari's and Muslim's canonic collections); the couple's Life of the Prophet; a translation of Ghazali's "Pure Faith Defined" (Qawa id al-aqaid, a chapter from The Revival of the Religious Sciences of the famous twelfth-century renewer of Sunni thought); a text by David Benjamin Keldani (1867-1940s), a former Uniate-Chaldean bishop from western Iran who converted to Islam in

114 WEB HISTORY

1904 and later wrote the book Muhammad in the Bible under the name "Abd al-Ahad Dawud; plus texts for children and texts denouncing other groups that had originated from within Islam but are generally regarded as heterodox by mainstream

Muslims: the A'madiyya-Qadiyaniyya, the Ismailiyya, the Bahais, and Rashad Khalifa's "United Submitters International."

For free downloading without registration, the site offered a selection of “cool Islamic references”—mainly pamphlets and introductions to “what every Muslim in the West should know.”¹⁴

Instruction was at first not to be free but was to be provided as a subscription service. This did not pay, however. In 1996, the site was “visited by over 39,000 visitors and only 29 contributed [sic].” Ahmad asked for checks to be mailed to him in anticipation of the large Islamic library to come:

We have over 80 mb of Koran almost ready to download, in shaAllah, just need more coding!

We will have Islamic orientation/introduction to Islam in the InterActive Islamic College, please let us know what you like to learn, even if you do not attend. Though if you subscribe will be a great help to you and your beloved.

\$ If you and your family can help to support the Mosque & College will be greatly rewarded and appreciated.¹⁵

Ahmad also explored other possibilities for income generation. Faithful to the metaphor of the “Mosque on the Internet,” he constructed—playing for the first time with the new Java Script—an area called “Souks around the Mosque,” which was meant as a space to advertise the businesses of fellow Muslims. His first entry there was CompuEx.com of Houston, the company that had taken over his Linuxvision. But except for two other entries, the Souk remained empty, and the area quietly lapsed. Later, Ahmad abandoned the idea that he could derive an income from his site and advertised it as being free.

NEW SPONSORS: THE “OFFICIAL SAMMANIA SITE”

(1998)

After the ‘real’ Azhar came online in late 1997/early 1998, Ahmad included a link to it on his site, which was still called the “Azhar Mosque of the Internet.”¹⁶ But only a few months later, reference to the Azhar was dropped (from the text as well as from the title) when, between September and December 1998, Ahmad

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

115

Darwish turned his “Azhar Mosque of the Internet” into the “Official Sammania Site.” Ahmad had been in contact with the Sammani shaykh !asan al-Fati” before (cf. the latter’s praise for Ahmad’s Seerah of December 1996). It is unclear how this contact first came about—perhaps during a visit by !asan al-Fati” to the United States in 1993. In September 1998, however, !asan al-Fati” attended the “2nd International Islamic Unity Conference” in Washington, DC, which was organized by the traditionalist “Islamic Supreme Council of America” (dominated by Hisham \$abbani’s Naqshbandiyya-!aqqaniyya). Most likely it was there that Ahmad Darwish introduced !asan al-Fati” to his internet site and received permission from the shaykh to turn this Mosque into the “Official Sammania Site.”

Figure 4:

Mosque.com,
December
1998

Not much else changed at first. An email address for Shaykh !asan was added, and in addition to his being “Chancellor of Um Durman Islamic University,” he now became “Chancellor of The Sammania Mosque of the Internet.”¹⁷ The Life of the Prophet, which previously had been advertised as a work by Ahmad and his wife, was now attributed to Ahmad’s shaykhs, !asan Qariballah and

“Abdallah al-Ghumari as well, as follows:

The Millenium Biography of Muhammad, by Grand Shaykh, Professor Hasan Qaribullah,

Dean of Umm Durman Islamic University and Sammania Grand Shaykh; Grand Muhibbin Master Abdullah Ben Sadek; Shaykha Anne Khadijah Darwish; Shaykh

116 WEB HISTORY

Ahmad Darwish (Shaykh Qaribulla USA Personal Secretary, The Founder of the Mosque of the Internet); Reviewed in part by Former manager of Muhammad Ali.¹⁸

Last not least, a lengthy introduction to the “Sammaniyyah Heritage Path” was published that began in quite ‘traditional’ style:

- Spiritual ancestry (Qadiria, Khalwatia, Naqshbandia, T. al-Anfas, T. al-Muwafaqa)
- Prerequisites and principles
- Base [al-asas]
- Four Cornerstones (reducing food, talk, sleep, socializing)
- Awrad
- Zikr
- Chain of Affiliation (Silsilah / Sanad)
- Symbol (waist wrap)
- Initiation Pledge [al-bay a]
- Seasons [annual & weekly rituals]

It ended, however, with a detailed “socio-scientific, educational and academic program” that reads like operationalized “objectives” in places and that mentions “task committees” responsible for specific tasks—a form of presentation and organization

that cast traditional elements of Sufi education into a model clearly derived from modern academic institutions:

- Socio-scientific, educational and academic program
- Lectures for brothers, youth, sisters
- Academic tutorials
- Social activities (visits, zakat, marriages, ...)
- Training activities (da'wa, practice of the 4 cornerstones)
- Spiritual activities (dhikr, ziyara, rabita)
- Islamic Sciences (publication & outreach)
- Construction (mosques, secondary schools, ...)
- Medical services (Koranic healing; free med. serv. during Ramadan)
- The ultimate goal: from loving Allah ... to being loved by Him
- At-Tariqah as-Sammaniyyah Task Committees¹⁹

It remains unclear, however, what impact the Sammania page ever had. A year after its start, by October 1999, it was obvious that Shaykh Hasan did not use his email address, and although two distinct buttons for him and for “Shaykh

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

117

Ahmad” remained on the site for a year, both pointed to Ahmad’s address only (which for a while was guru@hypersurf.com). In August 2000, the “Shaykh Ahmad” button was removed and only “Shaykh Hasan” remained—with an email address linking to Ahmad. After the site allegedly was hacked in late 2001, the “Shaykh Hasan” link was never restored. But a letter from one convert was published in June 2002, seeking clarification on a matter pertaining to the daily office (awrad), and stating that “I wish to proceed to the Divine Face in a short time” and “I plan to go to the Shaykh within the next month as I have been looking for a true teacher on the path for a long time.”

SEMPER FI: AMERICANIZING THE MOSQUE (1999)

Again, however, Ahmad felt the need to react to outside developments. A radical overhaul of the site was implemented in late March/early April 1999, when NATO attacked Serbia over Kosovo. The U.S. flag came up flying on the home page, which now was styled “The Free Islamic University.” Allah.com and Mu-

Figure 5:

Mosque.com,
Oct. 1999

118 WEB HISTORY

hammad.com (registered years ago) were now prominently promoted alongside Mosque.com, and Shaykh !asan became director of the “Sammania Spiritual and Academic Heritage Club.” The designation “Official Sammania Site on the Internet” was dropped, on the other hand. Further down on the site, cash donations were solicited for “your Muslim Brethren in Kosova.” The “Interactive Islamic College” turned into the “InterActive American Islamic College,” and by October 5, 1999, Ahmad had added the motto of the U.S. Marine Corps to the U.S. flag waving on his site: “Semper fi,” in honour of their “good work in Kosovo.”

OPEN SOURCE? HARVESTING MUHADDITH.ORG—

TO SURPASS HARVARD! (1999)

By Oct. 1999—a year after the Sammania started to ‘sponsor’ the site—the material offered by the IIC began to be upgraded. This was made possible “thanks to Linuxvision of the Cayman Islands,” who by April 1999 had started to be featured on the site—Ahmad Darwish’s company that produced the Sheba Arabization package for Linux based servers. Substantial numbers of Arabic texts were made available—and most of these were taken from Al Muhaddith, one of the earliest examples of online Islamic libraries that began in 1988 and opened its website (muhaddith.org) on November 30, 1998, offering “Search software, Islamic books and prayer times program for free download by all Muslims with online search. 119+ classic Islamic books, 300 MB+: Holy Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Dictionary and other Islam books.” A few months later, texts from Al Muhaddith started to appear on mosque.com, and subsequently, Ahmad Darwish’s eulogy of his own site reached new heights:

Starting 1/1/2000 the Mosque.com [the first Islamic site on the web ever] has surpassed Harvard and Oxford in the Islamic Scholarly Leadership. We register 10 Islamic Studies Students a day added to our daily over 1500 visitors actively in study, soon we will challenge the students of both Harvard and Oxford on-line. Stay Tuned. Mosque’s World Largest & Free Islamic and Arabic Collection: 85 References (some made of 20 volumes) Containing 2000,000 lines or 150,000 WebScreenPages[TM]. Enjoy, and give credit to al-Muhaddith and Sheba Arabic Systems of Linuxvision.com of Cayman Islands.²⁰

Respectability for the enterprise was sought by the Sammani Shaykh “[o]ffering an Accredited Ijaza and an optional Accredited MBA. You will receive a tradia

HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

119

tional sealed Ijaza In Islamic Studies signed with the seal of Prof. Shaykh Hasan Qaribullah.”²¹ The “accredited MBA” linked to the (commercial) Heriot-Watt University MBA, of which mosque.com became a distributor for a few months (by May 2000, this reference had been removed).

Registered visitors (registration was free) gained access to an impressive collection of both English and Arabic texts that, as explained, was taken from muhaddith.org—a source which, however, was only vaguely acknowledged. Where muhaddith.org works through a dedicated reading application that users need to download, the idea behind the IIC was that registered users study the texts online. Visitors were urged to read continuously and attentively—if one clicked the “Next” button too quickly, the following message popped up: “Please do not keep clicking, read in full then click! Please take your time reading, otherwise it will cost us bandwidth, we are sure you understand. Please go back and complete the reading of this WebPageScreen [tm]—Thanks.” Alternatively, however, a

download option was still offered for offline html browsing.

Figure 6:
Mosque.com, May
2000

REACHING OUT TO SPREAD ‘WHAT EVERY MUSLIM NEEDS’

Beyond the classical texts harvested from Al Muhaddith, Ahmad worked to expand his downloadable library of “all the documents that every Muslim needs”:

1. Islamic Brief (islam.doc a.k.a What is Islam?) **What everyone should know about Islam.**

Get it in Spanish Que es Islam? Se Hable Espanole?

120 WEB HISTORY

2. Holy Koran (koran.doc) by the mosque.com’s founders Grand Shaykh Hassan and Shaykh Ahmad—in a word document format

A. **The best Koran program on the Planet** (koran.zip) with all world languages by yildun.com

B. **TOPICS OF THE HOLY KORAN IN A NUTSHELL**

(KoranGlossary.doc)

3. Prophetic Quotes (hadith.doc) 171 subjects (1950 Prophetic Quotes.)

4. Life of Prophet Muhammad (seerah.doc) “Prophetic Bibliography: IN LOVE OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD” (first time in English)

5. Principles of Faith (faith.doc) by Algazel (al-Ghazali)

6. Civil Islamic Law (fiqh.doc) Coming Soon!

7. Praise Prophet Muhammad (dalail.doc) Burdah Poem and Dalail: Seven parts, one per day, a must have for personal spiritual growth.

8. Daily Contemplation (owrad.doc) of Sammania Qadiria—Coming Soon!

9. Reviving the Science of Religion (ihya.doc) by Algazel (al-Ghazali) Coming Soon!

10. Sex and Reproduction (halaljoy.doc)²²

In the same spirit of reaching out and engaging “every Muslim,” he attempted to initiate da“wa (the call to Islam) by email:

Enjoy and let others know about the college (...) Please share in the reward of spreading Islamic knowledge by telling your local Imam and the Islamic school near you about the Mosque of the Internet’s InterActive Islamic College. Be as creative as you can, the more you guide people the greater the reward. Here are some ideas: Make a flyer, send email to the friends and local community members. Write to the teachers of local Islamic and American schools. Tell Sunday school teachers. Write local news papers and journals.²³

Internet technology was to help every believer to familiarize him/herself with the basic texts and to take responsibility for spreading this knowledge and belief to as many people as possible. The net was a tool to empower believers to become agents of ‘basic Islam,’ made accessible through “the best Koran program on the Planet” and summarized in short “Islamic Briefs.”

The education programme was not immune, however, from the vagaries of the dot-com economy. The IIC had been Linuxvision’s first and major project by which the company hoped to make a name for itself in the Arabization market. When that failed, and after the 2001 site hack/hard disk crash, the IIC was much less vigorously pursued and vanished from the web sometime between August and December 2001.

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

121

“WAHABI TERROR”—WE HAVE KNOWN IT SINCE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY!

Another prominent feature of the site had long been its anti-Wahhabism, in the form of polemics against what it presented as the Sa“udi/Najdi “Taimia cult” (a derogatory reference to the paramount significance for contemporary Wahhabism and Salafism of the purist scholar Ibn Taymiyya [1263–1328]): Can Saudi Prince & Family, Sultan of Brunei and all Muslim Millionaires and Billionaires

in the west or the east spare another 2.5% annually of private wealth for Allah and His Prophet to put Islam right on the map as the Prophet's friends did? Also Can the 19 children of Ibn-AbdulWahab spare 2.5% annually from their \$28 Billion dollars trust? Hay, sometime the market goes down and you loose 2.5% anyway. You know what with Allah will never go down!²⁴

Saudis do not give money for true Islam—instead, they are trying to steal money from credulous Muslims, fraudulently using good names such as that of Shaykh !asan:

WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING

The Saudis: Dr. Ali Naseef, Muhammad Al-Ghamdi and Tayyib of Canada are running unauthorized and fraudulent activities stealing \$100s of dollars from Sufi sites throughout the world. They are very creative sometime they pose as they are from Mecca helping Mosques and mention good clean names like Prof Hasan al-Fateh etc or sell you domain name or banner on Allah.com. They ask people to transfer money to them via Western Union etc. If they contact you please call your local police immediately to trap them, or Email the FBI Cyber Squad. sandiego@fbi.gov Or call FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation J. Edgar Hoover Building 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C.

20535-0001 (202) 324-3000. **Allah.com, Muhammad.com, and Mosque.com neither request nor accept any money**²⁵

It is thus no wonder that the Wahhabis turned out to be terrorists. "The World Trade Center bombings [of 1993] were not the first of the Wahabi Terror"—Wahhabi terror had already been condemned by Sunni scholars in the nineteenth century:

At the beginning of the Arabian kingdom, thousands of Muslims were massacred by the deviant Wahabis, and the scholars of Ahlesuna (The people who follow the Prophetic ways) wrote their opposing response in their books. The Mufti of Mecca wrote, "...they marched with big armies...lay siege the Muslim area...killed the people, men, women, and children. They also looted the Muslims belongings. Only a few escaped their barbar

122
WEB HISTORY

ianism." Ref.: Mufti of Mecca, Ahmad Zayni Dahlan al-Makki ash-Shafi'i in his work "Fitnatu-l-Wahhabiyah."²⁶

9/11—A CHANCE FOR TRADITIONAL ISLAM?

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Ahmad Darwish added new texts to his site to emphasize that Islam is beautiful, and not about terror, that "Americans are NOT anti-Islam [... and] that Muslims are NOT all in support of Bin Laden," that the WTC victims are in Paradise, and that it was time to act: that "all Wahabi schools (that teach fanatical anti-Islamic actions)" should be converted "into traditional Islamic schools (that teach love and compassion and tolerance)." More concretely: "We recommend that the US investigate the \$18 billion in American Banks belonging to a Wahabi Fund, controlled by Wahabi's 19 children (Dallas, TX), and invest it in True Islamic schools."²⁷

True Islam was "traditional Islam"; it was about love, tolerance, learning, and spiritual development. This was the message of traditional shaykhs. And true to this spirit, "Professor Hasan El Fateh Qaribullah," "spiritual coach" to Mosque.com and "spiritual head of Sammania Spiritual Heritage Society with millions of followers worldwide, some of whom are dignitaries, USA ambassadors and USA army personnel," condemned the WTC attacks and blamed them on the Wahhabis.

At a time when U.S. authorities were obsessed with scrutinizing the financial affairs of Muslim institutions, Ahmad Darwish decided to make his Koran translation (now presented outright as undertaken by Shaykh !asan!) available for free: "It is in this spirit [of love] that Professor Hasan is freely giving away, this first clear translation of the meaning of the Koran to visitors of the above mentioned sites. He neither accepts nor asks financial support and his spiritual order

has no bank account.”²⁸

This was in clear contrast to 1997, when (on June 26) Mosque.com did ask for help: “If you and your family can help to support the Mosque & College will be greatly rewarded and appreciated. (...) Please mail checks to: (...) Fremont.” But although Ahmad Darwish took every opportunity to emphasize that “Prophet Muhammad ain’t one of them!”²⁹ he agreed with widespread feelings in the Muslim world when he spoke out against the U.S. attack on Afghanistan and against U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia:

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

123

there is an Islamic tradition served in Koran and Prophetic quotations, that non Muslims should not be in Arabia, Now over 20,000 American troops (some with civil duties) are in Arabia, this is again a very dangerous situation, since fanatic Wahabis will use this to their own advantage, since they pick and choose Islamic traditions.

On the other hand the masses of middle eastern Islamic countries feel that there is a conspiracy in the west to suppress Islamic societies. This is easily understood when one reviews the news of Bosnia, Chechnia in former USSR, and Kashmire where the west allowed a holocaust to continue.

Where is the sound advice of Harvard for the US Administration? I bet you they do not have a clue !!!³⁰

Figure 7:

Mosque.com,
January 2003

Overall, however, the site maintained a positive spirit in the hope that 9/11 could be a chance for true, traditional Islam: “America said, ‘Bye bye!’ to Ben Laden. America says, ‘Hello Prophet Muhammad of Allah.’” Ahmad Darwish hoped that the alarm over the Sa”udi involvement in the terror attacks would lead to a backlash against his old enemies, the Wahhabis: “If you like the wahabies click here—If you dislike the wahabies click here,” read two buttons on his site. Clicking on the first one led to a tirade equating the Wahhabis to Satan:

Preaching Islam is the first right due to all people in the west, not blowing them away falsely in the name of Jihad. Duh! Wahabi: Their Wahabi (Najdi) satan attempting to Kill Prophet Muhammad, then killed many many Muslims, now killing innocent christians besides Muslims who were in WTC

124 WEB HISTORY

Not to mention that the Afgani people have suffered a lot because of this war financially and civilian casualties, and that we pray for them all

What will happen if Wahabi, Brotherhood (Ikhwan) and Ben-Ladenism go away?

The best thing will happen, is setting Islam free from these Hijackers of Islam!

Where the west will welcome Prophet Muhammad and Islam.

Remember Wahabi started their system by killing many Muslims to take over Arabia, Now they started Killing innocent Christians (WTC). So EVIL DOING is their nature. satan loves najd, Saudi Arabia, the Wahabi head-office, all us know when satan appeared advising the unbelievers of Mecca to Kill prophet Muhammad, in Najd look and feel image)³¹

Clicking on the second button (“I hate the Wahhabis”) led to the solution: opening the way of the “good traditional Shaykhs:”

We have reached a cross road, either promote pure Islam or pay heavily for a fanatic takeover. Remember fanatics do not co exist with pure Islam.

I mean by promoting pure Islam, the media should open themselves for good traditional Shaykhs—it is strange that “Good Morning America” continue to welcome a priest and a rabbi to chat without a shaykh, while the number of Jews and Muslims in the US is equal!³²

THE MOSQUE SOLD?

In the beginning, Allah.com, Muhammad.com, and Mosque.com had more or less mirrored each other. Later, Mosque.com became the main site; Allah.com

was used to showcase the Koran translation, and Muhammad.com the Prophet's biography. By 2003, Ahmad Darwish began to think of a reorganization of his sites.³³

Then, in summer 2004, a disclaimer came up on mosque.com reading: "This site has nothing to do with www.Allah.com and www.Muhammad.com per sale's agreement." The person having bought it was presented as "Sheik AbdelRasool HANAFI, Lagos, Nigeria," and the sole purpose of the site was now to "be the most authority listing 1911 errros [sic] of wahabi in faith, fiqh and manners (akhlaq calling bad names to Imam Azam Abu Hanifa) and money, oil zakat fraud," and in particular "to reveal the truth about the Wahabi group who killed slaughtered my great great family in early 1800 who were living in Mecca and Medina during the siege by Wahhabis." In fact, however, the domain mosque.com continued to be registered until late 2007 in the name of Linuxvision, Sharjah, and has since been transferred to Ahmad Darwish. Even during

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

125

the "Nigerian" interlude of mid-2004 until July 2006, the language of the site closely resembled that of Ahmad Darwish's other enterprises, so one is left to wonder about the significance of this "sale."

ALLAH.COM VOTES KERRY

Following his celebration of the United States for their support for the Kosovo Muslims and his declaration of national solidarity after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, we have seen how Ahmad Darwish opposed the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. When U.S. and British troops invaded Iraq in March 2003, however, he remained conspicuously silent. He neither commented on the event, nor removed the button saying: "Please listen to this American anthem that turned into the whole world anthem" (which linked to <http://www.paperveins.org/anthem>, Virgil Wong's version of the U.S. national anthem celebrating global solidarity with the 9/11 victims). When President Bush stood for re-election a year later, however, Ahmad Darwish warned his fellow Muslims that

If you are a Muslim and USA citizen who does not vote or votes for Bush on November 2nd Allah will ask YOU for each drop of all the blood of Muslims 330,000 children shed in Bush's wars for Oil in both Afghanistan, Iraq and Palistaine and more to come. All Ulama of Pakistan, Malaysia and Azhar passed such verdict and Shaykh Ahmad Darwish of this Site confirms it. Remember your punishment will start in your tomb and Allah will bankrupt you in both your green dollar and in your Iman in this life. The Prophet will be quit of you here and hereafter and you receive no shafaat or mercy.

Amen³⁴

When Bush had won, all political overtones disappeared from the site, which refocused on offering the major texts that always had been at its core: the Koran translation, the biography of the Prophet, the translation ("in progress") of Prophetic Traditions. Together with his wife and daughter, Ahmad also began a new translation of parts of Ghazali's Revival of the Religious Sciences.

CUSTODIAN OF PROPHETIC TRADITION

ON THE INTERNET

In autumn 2005, Ahmad's sites suffered a technical problem. In October, Allah.com temporarily linked to other sites, and in November, Ahmad began to reconstruct the site, apparently from earlier backups. This reconstruction (which

126 WEB HISTORY

eventually also was reflected on Muhammad.com, and in the course of which mosque.com returned to Ahmad's trinity of sites) took some time; it was not completed until January 2006. The site's temporary instability may not be unrelated

to the fact that around this time, Ahmad left the United States and his Linux business there and returned to Cairo. Between August and October 2006, mosque.com and Muhammad.com redirected to alnabee.com, a minor Saudi site promoting the veneration of Prophet Muhammad, recommended by al-Azhar (Mawaqi" mufida, 2008). Around November 2006 they reverted to mirroring Allah.com. Not much else changed until May 2007, when a design update was implemented on all three sites and Ahmad built a separate Arabic site.³⁵ Simultaneously,

the site's host was temporarily moved to the Moroccan genious.net. By November 2007, Ahmad had integrated both Arabic and English into "the first and largest sites on Iman, Islam, Ihsan," "Allah.com from Chicago, the land of Muhammad Ali, Da Bulls, Mayor Richard Daley, who votes against any war. Take a virtual tour of Chicago."³⁶ At the same time, Ahmad also began to experiment

with new formats. On Oct. 28, 2007, he uploaded two short 'video' lectures (which besides the audio only contain a few still images) to Google Video. This was followed on March 28, 2008, by a proper video showing al-Ghumari together with Ahmad Darwish.³⁷ Apart from these novel formats, he continued to offer and expand on translations (not least, works by Ghazali), and very clearly positioned himself against the Wahhabi followers of "Ibn Taymia's Monkey Business in Faith": "700 years after the Prophet a man came to change all the faith of Islam and start spiritual and metarial [sic] terrorism!"³⁸ He lined himself up with like-minded defenders of a traditionalist understanding of Islam based on the four established Sunni schools of law (madhhabs), of Prophetic piety, and others who oppose what they regard as militant and extremist deviation from the true faith: !asanayn Makhluf (Egyptian state jurisconsultant [mufti] in the 1940s and 1950s), Mu"ammad Mitwalli al-Sharawi (1911–1998), Egypt's most famous twentieth-century TV preacher, "Abd al-!alim Ma"mud (1910–1978, shaykh al-Azhar 1973–1978), A"mad al-!Alawi (1869–1934), Sufi shaykh and teacher of several European Traditionalists, René Guénon (1886–1951), the father of contemporary Traditionalism) "Abd Allah al-Ghumari (v.s.), Mu"ammad al-Fati" Qariballah (1915–1986), Sammani shaykh and father of !asan al-Fati"), Hisham \$abbani (b. 1945), Naqshbandi shaykh, particularly active as missionary in the West, here portrayed together with Prince Charles, al-!abib "Ali al-Jifri

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

127

(b. 1971), traditionalist Muslim preacher, see <http://www.alhabibali.org>, "Amr Khalid (b. 1967), contemporary Islam's most influential televangelist (see <http://www.amrkhaled.net>), and !amza Yusuf [Hanson] (b. 1960), well-known traditionalist Muslim missionary from California (see <http://www.zaytuna.org>). Very openly he sought to find a new home in a "traditional" Sunni environment as he announced his hope, to the traditionalist Dar al-Mu%&afa (<http://www.daralmustafa.org>) in Yemen, "to move Allah.com administration to your office and to join you. He is waiting to hear from you!"³⁹

Figure 8: Screenshot from Allah.com, March 4, 2009

Figure 9: Screenshot from Muhammad.com, March 4, 2009

Sometime in mid-2008, Ahmad Darwish implemented another change in the layout of his site, announced since mid-January 2008, with the aim of making it easier to navigate his "Hadith Data Warehouse."⁴⁰ The design, which had become

very bloated, reverted to a more streamlined format similar to the one of early 2007 and presented "Shaykh Ahmad Darwish" as the faithful servant (khadim) of the two master keepers of proper Islamic tradition, al-Ghumari (for Prophetic Tradition) and al-Sha"rawi (for the Koran).⁴¹ Framed by these two, and visually cast in their mold, he was now founder and "full time research scholar" of Dar al-#adith al-Sharif" ala 'l-Internet ("The House of Prophetic Tradition on the Internet"). His goal there, he proclaimed, was to establish, with computer aid, no less than the definitive text of Prophetic Tradition, in analogy to the establishment of the canonical text of the Koran undertaken under the

128 WEB HISTORY

authority of the third caliph, "Uthman (r. 644-656) ("taghliq jam"al-#adith al-Sharif mithla jam"al-Quran al-Karim")—a goal that he set after looking at the shortcomings of The scholarly Saudi Society for the Prophetic Sunnah (<http://www.sunnah.org.sa>), a high-profile official institution that became operative in 2005. "Praise be to God who graced me with designing a 'live' effort that is better than the effort of the team of [Shaykh Mahr] al-Fa'l, all by myself. This is Majma"al-a"adith, a work that encompasses 50000 man years of the work of scholars in one vessel, with the help of only two assistants [... The method I followed is one that God] inspired me with (alhamanihi [sic]) and that no book or person pointed me to" (Darwish, n.d.).

CONCLUSION: THE INDIVIDUAL ON THE "HIGHWAY FOR KNOWLEDGE"

From degreeless software engineer to scholar-shaykh and "custodian of Prophetic Tradition," Ahmad Darwish set out to complete the work of the first caliphs by establishing the definitive canon of Islam. Fantastic as this story may sound, it is nevertheless not untypical. The challenge posed to the hegemony of traditional Muslim scholarly elites by people with an educational background in secular fields (medicine, engineering, law, literary studies, accounting, etc.) has been a dominant theme in twentieth-century Islam; many of the most prominent names in contemporary Islamic thought and action exemplify this challenge. Ahmad Darwish is far from being prominent; even his high-profile web address has not helped to secure him a significant audience.⁴² But he is typical of a larger trend: that the individual believer—in principle, every individual believer—assumes the right and takes responsibility for understanding what Islam means and for spreading this understanding in public. To interpret, in public, what Islam means, to talk in the name of Islam, is no longer the prerogative of scholars who have had a specialized education, or of Sufi shaykhs who have been initiated by their masters. It is the right—and some would say, the duty—of every believer. This threatens the power to define Islam that religious specialists have long held: 'I don't need a shaykh when I can have direct recourse myself to the basic sources, to Koran and Prophetic Tradition.'⁴³ At heart, this is a development that advances the emancipation of the individual from traditional authorities.

The internet is an ideal platform for spreading and facilitating such an individualized approach to interpreting Islam, and software guru Ahmad Darwish

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

129

has indefatigably used it, like other technologies before, to present his version of the faith. He constructed "the First Site of Prophet Muhammad on the Internet,"

the “Mosque of the Internet,” “The Free Islamic University,” to make available “all the documents that every Muslim needs,” the “Largest Give Away Free Islamic Authentic References” (first and foremost, his own Koran translation—with subtitles to facilitate understanding!—and his “Millenium Biography of Muhammad”), and thus spread “The Leading Islamic Revival Plan.” This particular case may reflect an inflated self-confidence, but it merely magnifies the growing importance

of the role the individual assumes in picking and choosing and remixing and interpreting for him- or herself what Islam means.

Of course, we must not ignore that Ahmad set himself up in the garb and as the successor of Islamic scholars (“ulama#”), as the one who serves and completes Tradition. But his own words (in the preface to his al-Ta “qib al-matin” ala “Manahij al-mu “addithin”) betray that behind the ostensible defence of tradition there lingers a new distribution of roles. The scholar—that is now me: “Praise be to God—I was the first to establish Islamic sites on the Internet (...) I was Shaykh of the Internet in the early eighties, all in order to serve our traditional heritage (al-turath) [and on my sites can be found] most of what God has made to come about through my hands and those of my wife.”

Defining ‘myself’ as the foremost scholar signals a dialectic whereby traditional learning is not merely reconfirmed as a model but is consciously reconstructed by the individual. Allah.com illustrates this reconstruction of tradition, illustrates how an individual uses new technology to make sense, by way of bricolage,

of the world and of his religion, reducing and simplifying the canon for the sake of facilitating access to what “every Muslim needs,” and breaking down hierarchies in the process.

The process whereby such individualized reconstruction of meaning displaces the traditional self-evidence of a world-view defined by scholarly experts may be regarded as an important component of modernity. The internet facilitates this process, but it has not caused it. The website Allah.com is embedded in a longer historical dynamic where Muslims at the social periphery of the scholarly establishment questioned the epistemological basis of scholastic tradition and employed a variety of means including the new media of the time to make every individual responsible for understanding a simplified body of knowledge and for

130 WEB HISTORY

implementing it in practice (Hofheinz, 1993). Website history, at bottom, does not begin with the web.

NOTES

1. Allah.com, Nov. 2001 vs. May 2005. Until Aug. 2004, the site called itself “The First Mosque of the Internet—Since 1986.” As for other domains based on the name “Allah,” “Allah.org” was registered March 19, 1996 by islamicity.com (the oldest and still one of the biggest Islamic portal sites); it contains an interface to RealAudio and text versions of the “Names of Allah” but no other content. “Allah.net” was registered on 21 Nov. 1996 by Bhavesh Sutaria, a Hindu or Jain from the U.K., possibly out of commercial interest; it has never been in active use.

“Allah.info” was registered in 2002 to refer to “Quran.org,” a minor English-language Islamic site based in New Hampshire that is online since 1996. A few country-specific “Allah” domains exist but only outside the Arab world, and none of them is prominent: e.g., allah.ir (a general Persian portal), allah.pk (a Flash Koran), allah.tk (a Pakistani personal site not updated since the 1990s), or allah.jp (the Islamic Circle of Japan).

2. <http://web.archive.org/web/20041229171046/http://www.Allah.com/>, JesusMuhammad.com,

Ghumari.org, and Qadiria.com were maintained by the owner of Allah.com in 2004-05 but lapsed in 2006. The “Free-For-Ever Matrimony Club of Muhammad.com” section (<http://66.240.115.245/ad101/Muhammad/marry.html>) in mid-2005 contained nine female personal ads lifted from matrimony.org (“Muslim Marriage Link”) around Sep. 2004—ads that had since been deleted from the original site. The Matrimony Club never went beyond the “Under construction” stage.

3. <http://web.archive.org/web/20020524034244/http://www.Allah.com/>.
4. On May 5, 1999, Ahmad Darwish registered the domain grandcaymanbank.com, for a planned “alal offshore bank. The project never materialized, and by Dec. 2007, Ahmad Darwish had changed the registration to “US law firm Sidley Austin for Former 3 times WHW. Boxer Muhammad Ali Hon. Herbert [sic] M,” with himself as contact person. For a while, Linuxvision also held the domain 1iso.com (“global Muslims and guests web presence covering all Muslims (and the world) languages.” This pointed to ishebaplanet.com in 2002, but lapsed shortly afterwards. In spring 2000—just before the New Economy bubble burst—Ahmad Darwish attempted to solicit Muslim software developers to increase his Internet business: “Remember, there are even lots of free software that can help us to outperform them all. If we do not do it, Muslims will be lead for ever and pay ‘others’ their money, having no control of morality or children safety. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED PLEASE CONTACT ME, IT WILL BE A FAIR EXCHANGE LEADING TO THE LARGEST MUSLIM GLOBAL PUBLIC OFFERING COMPANY IF ALLAH WILLS INSHAALLAH” (Idapguru@yahoo.com, email communication to those registered on mosque.com, May 7, 2000).
5. iShebaPlanet was named after iPlanet (an erstwhile E-commerce solutions platform by Sun) and the “Sheba Linux Arabization Server Package.”

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

131

6. “Java Six Sigma Server,” for “analyzing and controlling organizational quality and performance”; “Java Candlestick Server,” a “tool in interpreting trends in share prices, invented by the Japanese some two hundred years ago”; and “Java Medical Server,” for patient record management and medical office work (<http://www.linuxvision.com>, retrieved September 17, 2005). The coding for these applications was largely done through contracted third-party coders (About Buyer Alan Darwish, 2007).
7. <http://Muhammad.com>, retrieved Sep. 1, 2008.
8. The first instance I found of Ahmad Darwish referring to himself as “Shaykh Ahmad” dates from 1998/99, then as a clear subordinate to “Shaykh Hasan” (see p.117). But only after what appears to be the definitive end of his software career and his move to Cairo, he consistently presents himself as a Shaykh, first as “Ahmad Darwish (al-)Shaykh” (used after the reconstruction of his site in January 2006), then from mid-2006 with increasing prominence as “Shaykh Ahmad Darwish.”
9. Ahmad Darwish acknowledged the importance of this influence when on July 22, 2004, he established the website Ghumari.org (which lapsed, however, shortly afterwards). Already in October 2003, he appears to have set up the Yahoo! Group Al-Ghumari • Zawiyyah Siddiqia (<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/Al-Ghumari/>). For information on al-Ghumari, see his works in the reference list, as well as Tamam (n.d.); Mursi (1968); Sadek (n.d.).
10. Apparently based on Abdallah b. al-!iddiq al-Ghumari, Bab al-taysir fi raddi i tibar “al-Jami” al-!aghbir”—and thus ultimately on the Egyptian polymath al-Suyu&i’s (1445–1505) summary of Prophetic Traditions for a larger public. In Chicago in 1981, Ahmad received a formal authorization (ijaza) from al-Ghumari to transmit the famous “adith scholar and revivalist Mu!ammad al-Shawkanî’s (1759–1834) list of works he had studied, It “af al-akabir bi-isnad al-dafatir (reproduced at <http://www.Allah.com/pdf/42VirtuesOfTheProphet.pdf>, retrieved March 4, 2009).
11. Interactive Islamic College, June 1, 1997. For a sense of the whole, here is the 1997 version of his translation of the first Surah: “In the Name of Merciful, the Most Merciful Allah, // The praise is for Allah , // the Lord of the worlds. // The Merciful, the Most Merciful. // The Owner of the Day of Repayment. // You we worship and You we rely upon for help. // Guide us to the Straight Path. // The Path of those You have favored, // not those upon whom is the wrath, // nor those who are astray.” The translation was subsequently amended, last in 2001 (<http://salicehajic.startlogic.com/cgi-bin/mt.cgi?lang=en&cfile=KoranInSubjects>, retrieved March 2, 2009).
12. “Interactive Islamic College,” June 1, 1997. Reference is to two of the most well-known twentieth-

century Muslim biographies of the Prophet.

13. <http://web.archive.org/web/19971221131210/http://mosque.com/>.
14. On June 1, 1997, the following texts were offered, in addition to "selections" from IIC: "What Every Muslim in the West Should Know / What Everyone, Should Know About Islam" "What is Islam" / Click for your local approximate prayer time +10/-10 mins / Celebrated Azharian said: "Shakespeare said 'BLOOD is no argument'" / Cool Islamic References—refuting the anti Ahle-Sunat wa al-Jamaat. / She said when her marriage broke up: "The only good thing was Islam" / New Trends: selections from American Scientists who embraced Islam WEB HISTORY
15. Iam / Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Celebration. / Muhammad Yunus, ABC's Person of the Week / Need a Prayer or to pray?", <http://web.archive.org/web/19970601012129/http://www.mosque.com/>
16. "Interactive Islamic College," June 1, 1997.
17. <http://web.archive.org/web/19990128174557/www.mosque.com/sammania.html>.
18. <http://web.archive.org/web/20021128053622/http://Muhammad.com/>.
19. Both outlines are from <http://web.archive.org/web/19990128174557/www.mosque.com/sammania.html>.
20. <http://web.archive.org/web/20000301142242/http://mosque.com/>.
21. <http://web.archive.org/web/20000301142242/http://mosque.com/>.
22. <http://web.archive.org/web/20020528125431/http://www.mosque.com/>.
23. Email sent to registered users by mosque@mosque.com, May 5, 2000. In another email (July 8, 2000) with the subject "Vote for the Prophet," we read: "Please go to this site and vote for the Holy Prophet (PBUH). 'http://www.msnbc.com/modules/Millennium_People/MillP_ReligPhilos.asp' It is an NBC channel site. They are polling for the person who did the best for mankind."
24. <http://web.archive.org/web/20000301142242/http://mosque.com/>.
25. <http://web.archive.org/web/20010802154719/http://www.mosque.com/index.html>. The names given cannot easily be identified.
26. <http://web.archive.org/web/20020330100947/12.109.24.76/index.html>. Almad Zayni Da'lan was a leading nineteenth-century Meccan scholar whose anti-Wahhabi stance has served as a reference for many twentieth-century opponents of the Wahhabiyah.
27. <http://web.archive.org/web/20020528125431/http://www.mosque.com/>.
28. <http://web.archive.org/web/20011217234327/12.109.24.76/>.
29. <http://web.archive.org/web/20011217234327/12.109.24.76/>.
30. http://web.archive.org/web/*http://www.compuex.com/ad101/wahab2.html.
31. http://web.archive.org/web/*http://www.compuex.com/ad101/wahab.html.
32. http://web.archive.org/web/*http://www.compuex.com/ad101/wahab2.html.
33. First, a note was added to mosque.com saying: "The Mosque of the Internet: Mosque.com is solely for Non-Muslims to welcome them to Islam NOT to wahabi-colt. Please, if you are already a Muslim, go to the physical mosque near you. To learn ONLY from Allah and His Prophet Muhammad. Please visit www.Allah.com and www.Muhammad.com," <http://web.archive.org/web/20030130074537/http://mosque.com/>.
34. <http://web.archive.org/web/20041020060725/http://www.Allah.com>.
35. First visible on archive.org in June 2007 in a subdirectory of Allah.com ("The First Global Prophetic Sayings DataWarehouse", <http://web.archive.org/web/2007062610051/www.genious.net/~darwish/indexar.html>), than directly under Muhammad.com ("1st Global Hadith Dataware House", <http://web.archive.org/web/20070803005941/http://www.Muhammad.com/>).
36. <http://web.archive.org/web/20071118061052/http://www.Allah.com>.

A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

133

37. <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2089838931886508940&ei=fPeuSZq4IoySiQK47diwDg&q=%22ahmad+darwish%22>; <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7836303352863805471&q=source%3A005164779214297107404&hl=en>; <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8196279095019931285&q=source%3A005164779214297107404&hl=en>.
38. <http://web.archive.org/web/20071118061052/http://www.Allah.com>. Cf. also his call, in Arabic on the same site, that the Saudi government should stop supporting "suicidal Wahhabi activities and fighting the proponents of the four law schools."
39. <http://web.archive.org/web/20071221021306/http://www.Allah.com>. On Traditionalism, see Sedgwick, 2006. In January 2008, Ahmad Darwish expanded his list of men considered authoritative and included many links from Omar Klaus Neusser's Traditionalist Sufi website

livingislam.org (establ. 2003).

40. <http://web.archive.org/web/20080127163408/Allah.com/newindex.html>.

41. In mid-November 2007, Ahmad Darwish changed his self-description from khadim al-mawqi "wa'l- "adith al-sharif ("custodian of the site and of the noble Prophetic Tradition") to khadim al- "afi %ayn ("custodian / servant of the two Keepers [of the Koran]"; <http://web.archive.org/web/20071108205444/http://www.Allah.com/> vs. <http://web.archive.org/web/20071118061052/http://www.Allah.com/>). The designation khadim al- "afi %ayn, which evokes the official title of the Saudi King, Khadim al-#aramayn (Custodian of the Two Holy Places) was later changed to the somewhat less ambitious khadim al- "uffa % (servant of the Keepers) (<http://Allah.com>, retrieved March 4, 2009).

42. See Allah.com—Traffic Details from Alexa. (n.d.). Retrieved regularly over the years, last on March 7, 2009 from http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/Allah.com. In August 2008, Shaykh Ahmad undertook his "1st UK tour." This venture into the off-line public caused both Salafis and rival Sufis to denounce him in public (Shaykh Darwish 1st UK Tour, 2008). This was related to Ahmad himself polemicizing against Muslims whom he accused of having sold their faith, naming not only several Sufi shaykhs prominent in the West but also lashing out at Muslims in the Arab world in general, in an August 2008 interview with an English adept that was leaked on YouTube (Ahmad Darwish (Allah.com) on Islam & Muslims Part 1 of 6, 2008). References to the tour were removed from Ahmad's websites after September 2008.

43. Cf. Ahmad Darwish (Allah.com) on Islam & Muslims (FULL) (2008), in particular around minute 37.

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134 WEB HISTORY

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A HISTORY OF ALLAH.COM

135

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